Cooking Abilities of Young Children

Helping prepare and cook foods is a great way for children to:
  • learn,
  • have fun, and
  • try nutritious foods.

What activities your child will be able to help with will depend on her or his age. Keep the following in mind when including young children in cooking activities.

Two-year-olds are learning to use the large muscles in their arms. Try activities such as:
  • scrubbing vegetables and fruits
  • carrying unbreakable items to the table
  • dipping foods
  • washing and tearing lettuce and salad greens
  • breaking bread into pieces

Three-year-olds are learning to use their hands. Try activities such as:
  • pouring liquids into batter (you measure first)
  • mixing batter or other dry and wet ingredients together
  • shaking a drink in a closed container
  • spreading butters or spreads
  • kneading dough
  • washing vegetables and fruit
  • serving foods
  • putting things in the trash after cooking or after a meal

Four and Five-year-olds are learning to control small muscles in their fingers. Try activities such as:
  • juicing oranges, lemons, and limes
  • peeling some fruits and vegetables (bananas and even onions)
  • mashing soft fruits and vegetables
  • scrubbing vegetables (potatoes, mushrooms)
  • cutting soft foods with a plastic knife (mushrooms, hard-boiled eggs)
  • pressing cookie cutters
  • measuring dry ingredients
  • cracking open/breaking eggs
  • beating eggs with an egg beater
  • setting the table
  • wiping up after cooking
  • clearing the table after a meal